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ABSTRACT

Efforts to reform educational administration programs depend on the ability of faculty members to develop shared purpose and understanding. This paper describes the experiences of nine faculty members in a department of educational administration in a large midwestern university, who, in seeking to transform their preparation program, transformed departmental relationships. It identifies the critical dimensions of departmental transformation and describes the results as implemented in new models of program purpose, design, teaching, research, and assessment. Data were collected through structured interviews and reviews of critical-incident reports, personal reflective statements, and narrative writings. Data indicate that the change process resulted in: (1) an increased sense of faculty ownership; (2) deepened interpersonal understanding and regard; (3) an enhanced sense of participation in collaborative learning community, which deepened professionalism and enhanced performance; (4) an expanded awareness of individual interests and increased willingness to shared resources and ideas; (5) the articulation of a shared desire to become less traditional; (6) transformation of program design, teaching methods, and assessment models; and (7) an increase in instances of collaboration. In conclusion, deliberate action informed by research and fueled by shared commitment can shape new departmental norms, values, and purpose. Departmental community building can lead to higher levels of professional development and new standards of program excellence. Contains 10 references. (LMI)

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SHAPING DEPARTMENTAL COMMUNITY: ENGAGING INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLEGIALITY IN PURSUIT OF SHARED PURPOSE

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Shaping Departmental Community:

Engaging Individualism and Collegiality

in Pursuit of Shared Purpose

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Introduction

Recent efforts to transform educational administration preparation programs have stressed the importance of holistic integration and coherence; clarity of purpose and focus in program design and implementation; caring and connection. (Murphy,1992; Milstein et al.1993; Beck,1994; Sergiovanni, 1994).

Attainment of this transformation is only possible when those individuals primarily responsible for programs--faculty members of educational leadership departments--succeed in achieving among themselves those very qualities desired for the overall program; that is, when they are able to develop new dimensions of shared purpose and understanding. Development of new sets of connections among individual faculty is the antecedent *sina qua non* of comprehensive program reform. Building of departmental community can merge traditional norms of

professorial individualism and isolation with new models of collegial interconnection. This new sense of collegiality can serve as the tie that binds faculty together, transforming what Sergiovanni calls a collection of individual "I's" to a collective "we", and connecting individual fields of discipline and specialization into a coherent, holistic program built on shared values and ideals.

In this paper, we describe the process and outcomes experienced by the nine faculty members of a department of educational administration in a large midwestern university, who, in seeking to transform their preparation program, transformed themselves and their relationships. We articulate the critical ingredients and dimensions of departmental transformation, and describe the results as implemented in new models of program purpose, design, teaching, research and assessment. By a conscious process of community building, the faculty created a new departmental sense of community, through which a unifying sense of shared purpose and focus was articulated. The new connections and sense of collegiality established enhanced individual faculty strengths and enriched the efficacy and power of the department as a whole. This process of departmental community building is presented in the hope that it may serve as a model for others in the professoriate seeking to improve their own administrator preparation programs.

Critical Dimensions of the Process

Long recognized as a major national developer of educational administrators, the department entered a new era in 1989 with the hiring of a reform-minded, change-oriented chairperson. Her mandate was clear: guide the department toward new levels of leadership and connection with external partners, recruit new faculty, enhance the quality of all existing programs and develop a doctoral program. The last five years have indeed been a period of enormous change. At a dizzying pace,

departmental conversations about research, personal areas of concern, and shared interests and goals. Gradually, a new culture began to emerge, one characterized by focus on clarity of purpose, coherence, research, analysis, reflection and articulation. . . the department was becoming a learning community.

b. The role of the department as a center of faculty identity, collegiality and professionalism. In her work on academic departments in high schools, Siskin (1994) identified the power of individual departments to shape the culture, attitude, identity and beliefs of its participants. It was within the unique environment of each department that professional lives were lived, and decisions were made that affected the quality of instruction offered students. Powerful norms were established that determined whether or not teaching and learning would be dynamic, interactive, authentic and liberatory, or static, disconnected, irrelevant and controlled. Awareness of these findings at the secondary level had relevance for departmental life at the university. If this was indeed the locus of change--even more so than at the high school level, given the autonomous loose coupling of higher education--then it was at the departmental level that the new reality would be constructed, and that the individual lives and the quality and character of the department as a whole would be shaped. The centrality of the department as the arena for change meant that special attention had to be paid to its well-being. One could not simply take for granted that it existed; rather, since it was the center of the relationships that were the essential prior condition for departmental reform, it was important to invest energy and care to nurture its growth and development. Though the department had an official chairperson, it was in fact our shared environment, one for which we all were responsible, in which we would either individually and collectively wither or thrive.

c. Critical aspects of community building and collegiality. Barth (1991) and Sergiovanni (1994) have both written on the importance of the relationships among

new faculty were nationally recruited and hired, and a new departmental direction evolved.

For members of the department, the process was one of exhilaration, stress and opportunity. The world of public education was changing; educational administration programs were involved in intensive review and reformulation; stakeholders were more diverse and more vocal. There could be no going back or standing still.

As faculty began the process of program transformation, what emerged was a growing understanding that true change could only occur "inside out". Authentic program transformation could only occur as a result of deep participation, collaboration and ownership by every individual. In brief, what was the essential prerequisite of program transformation was the development of true departmental community, of a sense of *gemeinschaft* (Sergiovanni, 1994) which would bind individual faculty through shared purpose, beliefs, values, commitment and effort.

Other key dimensions emerged as driving forces of the departmental community development process. Together, they provided a framework and set of guiding principles within which the transformation process could proceed. These included the following:

a. Constructivist learning theory. The process of inquiry, acquisition and assimilation of new knowledge was initiated with an understanding that all participants were coming together with their own prior knowledge and experience base, and their own subjective perceptions of reality. What was essential for new learning was the creation of an open-ended, receptive, dynamic, evolutionary process which permitted the questioning of the status quo, the introduction of new knowledge, and the provision of time for the construction of new individual and shared understandings, meaning and common purpose. Accordingly, new time was scheduled and reserved; new opportunities were structured for extended

the members of a school as perhaps the critical variable in the quality of the entire enterprise. Barth described the crisis found in many schools--faculty separated from one another, compartmentalized; helpless and trapped in their jobs, powerless and frustrated. In his view, outside-of-school remedies offered

> "only modest hope of influencing the basic culture of the schools, and it is in the ethos of the workplace where the problems reside and where, I believe, the most promising solutions reside as well. The key is the quality of interactions between teacher and teacher, and teacher and administrator" (p. 12).

The isolation found among teachers in K-12 education exists all too frequently in higher education. Here, too, "parallel play" and "withholding" are evident, as faculty lead their separate lives in professional isolation. In contrast, Barth describes environments which he calls truly collegial, in which faculty engage in four specific behaviors:

1. Talk about practice--frequent, continuous and precise.
2. Observation of each other engaged in the practice of teaching.
3. Shared engagement in work on curriculum--planning, designing, researching and evaluating.
4. Teaching each other what they know about teaching, learning and learning; revelation, articulation and sharing of craft knowledge (p. 31).

When such behaviors are the norm, the results are better decisions, more effective implementation of decisions, higher level of morale and trust, energizing or faculty learning and enhanced motivation and learning on the part of students. "The task of developing collegiality," he concludes, "may be integral to the task of improving schools". It is only by building a "community of learners" and a "community of leaders" that true reform can be achieved.

Shulman (1993) addressed what he called the "pedagogical solitude" of professorial life, the isolation that faculty experience when the close the classroom door. He urged that teaching, along with scholarship, be made community property, through a series of actions that made it visible and valued. Through *pedagogical colloquia*, he suggested that faculty could acquire new knowledge and understanding of their colleagues' approaches to teaching, to course design, to the pedagogy of their specific area. Departmental community for Shulman would thus be enriched by the inclusion of professional conversation about teaching and learning.

Sergiovanni (1994) echoed Barth in his belief that, "The lead villain in the school reform effort is the loss of community in our schools and in society itself..." (p. iii). Further, he distinguished authentic community from counterfeit community, noting that the former represented gemeinschaft of kinship, of place, of mind and of memory. True reform--deep reform--involved not merely change in practice but in theory, in "how we think, what we believe". Community building was critical and had to be the unique creation of each group of participants. "There is no recipe for community building," he wrote. "We cannot have a workshop. We have to invent our own practice of community."

d. Educational reform and the change process. The work of Fullan (1993) served to guide the department's progress into the unpredictable world of change. Describing the "paradigm breakthrough" in thinking about change, he wrote of the environment in which we now find ourselves:

> It is a world where change is a journey of unknown destination, where problems are our friends, where seeking assistance is a sign of strength, where simultaneous top-down bottom-up initiatives merge, where collegiality and individualism co-exist in productive tension. (p. viii)

In contrast with earlier notions of change, he joined Wheatley (1992) in describing the unpredictability and non-linearity of change in complex

environments. Unpredictability is not merely something that "gets in the way", but is rather normal.

> What appears simple is not so--introducing a seemingly small change turns out to have wild consequences. What appears complex is less so--enabling a few people to work on a difficult problems produces unanticipated windfalls. (Fullan, p. viii).

In addition, Fullan delineated the stressful aspects of the change process, the requirements that we "suspend belief, take risks, and experience the unknown" (p. 17). Describing the anxiety, conflict and stress that accompany the change process, he defined as one of the core capacities required for effective change agentry that of collaboration.

> There is a ceiling effect to how much we can learn if we keep to ourselves. The ability to collaborate. . . is becoming one of the core requisites of postmodern society...People need one another to learn and to accomplish things. (p. 17).

Operating within the framework consisting of the four critical dimensions described in this section, members of the department initiated a process of constructing a new sense of departmental purpose and community. Through seemingly paradoxical, both individuality and collegiality were enriched. The commitment to constructivist learning and reflection, and the safety of true community facilitated the questioning and critique of inherited and ongoing patterns and programs in light of new knowledge and inquiry. Understanding of the complexities of the change process prepared participants to deal with the difficulties of experimentation, innovation and restructuring.

In the emerging new departmental community, the three traditional realms of professorial activity--teaching, research and service--were re-examined in the context of the new collaborative culture. What had been "hidden, private and solitary" became "community property", visible for all to consider. Individual

expertise was augmented by the new "community of mind", by shared understandings of complex issues.

Lived Experience of the Individual and Departmental Change Process: Major Themes

In order to understand the multiple dimensions of the process of departmental transformation, an investigation was conducted into the experience of the change as lived by individual faculty members. Various methods of qualitative research were employed to access faculty perceptions of both the individual and departmental change process. Included were structured interviews, critical incident reports, personal reflective statements and narrative writings. Eight major findings were identified:

a. Increased sense of faculty ownership and excitement about clarified departmental focus, and growth in personal and departmental power.

b. Deepening of inter-personal understanding, regard, caring, support and relationship.

c. Enhanced sense of participation in a collaborative learning community which deepened professionalism and enhanced performance.

d. Expanded awareness of individual interests and expertise along with increased willingness to share resources, ideas and experiences to help transform program.

e. Articulation of shared desire to become less traditional and confirmation of commitment to thoughtful innovation and experimentation.

f. Transformation of program design, teaching methods and assessment models, with new emphasis on interdisciplinary case studies, complex problem identification and problem solving.

g. Increase in instances of collaboration: shared/team teaching; co-research and authorship efforts; co-proposal writing and conference presentation.

a. Increased sense of faculty ownership and excitement about clarified departmental focus, and growth in personal and departmental power.

A catalyst to the entire process of community building was the newly developed doctoral program. Still in its early stages, the program was a particular source of pride to the department, and a focus for intense scrutiny and review. Critique of the first two comprehensive doctoral examinations led to the conclusion that a change in format was required. The process of assessing student knowledge in particular areas and disciplines was viewed as too segmented and departmentalized. What was desired was a more holistic way of assessing student capacities to engage in problem analysis and problem solving in complex environments.

The result was the development of the inter-disciplinary doctoral case study examination. Case teaching was not a new pedagogical method in the department, but it had long been used in single courses by individual professors. Now, the challenge was to design a comprehensive examination in which all aspects of the preparation program were integrated into a holistic scenario--that is, to replicate in narrative a more realistic educational environment similar to that which a graduate might encounter upon graduation. In addition, issues of assessment and grading would have to be addressed in an effort to assure commonality of purpose, criteria and reliability among readers.

The process of departmental case preparation and assessment provided an opportunity for all members of the department to gain ownership in the doctoral

program, and to develop both individual and departmental power. For one member, the collaborative process of conversation, case writing, critiquing and rewriting served as,

> . . .a first opportunity to involve everyone in the doctoral program. It was a unifying factor which enabled us to work together to improve the product, forming a sort of synergistic meshing of the personal into departmental power.

For another, the process was "creative, collaborative, supportive, respectful and motivating". A senior member of the department stated,

> It was a first attempt to crystallize what had been inchoate rumblings and to learn of colleagues' personal platforms and how they related to departmental focus.

Contributing to the process of departmental ownership building and clarity of focus was the reconsideration of the existing design of courses and programs at the Masters and Specialist levels. For some members of the department, these issues had been settled in the past few years, through the efforts that had been made since 1989. For those more recent members, there were new questions to be raised.

> At one of our meetings, Rob had a recommendation about technology, and Jane said, "Wait a minute, we've already written our knowledge base, and we said 'x, y and z' ".
>
> What I saw was a discussion about whether the knowledge base issue was closed or still open, and then we came to an agreement that yes, if we have new people, we're going to have to look at the knowledge base in a different way. That was different, because when I first came in to the department, there was no discussion...It was a done deal.

Thus, faculty experienced as one critical dimension of departmental transformation the "unfreezing" of the "givens", and the opportunity to contribute to the reshaping and redefinition of the department. The result was a new sense of personal efficacy and departmental power.

b. Deepening of inter-personal understanding, regard, caring, support and relationship.

The process of collaborating on the writing of the departmental case study served as a vehicle by which new faculty connections were forged. One member, in her second year in the department, expressed her views as follows.

> The setting of working on the case study provided us a forum for identifying commonalities that connect us and the threads that run through us. In evidence were human relations skills that allowed us to blend our styles and build on our strengths and limitations.
>
> Before last year, the group was smaller, and I was new. My perspective was that you listen and keep your mouth shut. We arrived here with a certain body of knowledge and people said, "share it", but we were not really comfortable doing that. Now there is more support for it and I am more able to deal with what the organization is asking for.
>
> Early on we were trying to resolve some issues and problems that were very big and we had not gone through the infancy stages of developing our relationship; our trust and respect. The forum for developing the case study allowed us to do that.

For a new member of the department, the process was particularly significant as an opportunity for acculturation and professional development.

> Probably for me, on a personal level, I saw how we needed to develop case studies, how the process worked, and how we got involved as a group. I also saw that if we were going to use these as doctoral examinations, we all needed to be using them in classes, so it emphasized for me the need to use case studies in my teaching.

The theme of new understanding, community building and caring was expressed by all. For one, the process "helped me to better understand the perspectives of others." For another, "It pointed up the need to develop, cultivate, stimulate and value one another's views as members of a department." Particularly revealing were the comments of one faculty member, now in her fourth year in the department.

> I felt that formerly, as a person and not just as a black female, that my point of view was quite different than that of others in the traditional university setting.
>
> Now, I really felt a lot more support for speaking out, knowing that my point of view would be different. I felt that in throwing my ideas on the table, I wouldn't necessarily get people to agree, and that was all right. I did get people who respected the fact that it was a different perspective, not placing a value judgment on it at all, but instead, recognizing that it is a different point of view, and hearing people say, let me hear a little more about that.

Thus, the process of working together to create a new reality--a new specific product (the exam) and a new, distinctive departmental feature, served as an opportunity for faculty to have extended conversations, to share expertise, to better understand others' perspectives, and to create a culture in which new ideas were introduced, considered and included as part of a new comprehensive whole.

c. Enhanced sense of participation in a collaborative learning community which deepened professionalism and enhanced performance.

One significant aspect of the process of departmental community building that emerged was the establishment of new norms of sharing and collaboration. By engaging in ongoing conversation about curriculum content and assessment design, faculty were able to take advantage of repeated opportunities to "draw one another out, to talk among ourselves about our field, and to utilize what we had learned." One faculty member articulated that the case writing was, "one of many collaborative activities which are becoming a part of our culture", indicating his reflection on what had been...and what was emerging. For the most senior member of the department, the new culture provided opportunities for her continued development.

> Our meetings have changed significantly in the seven years I have been in the department. Formerly, all agenda items were set by the department head. Little if any dialogue was the norm. Now, I see fewer "traditional" staff meetings and more meetings where we can draw on one another's strengths and supplement our limitations or as yet undeveloped potentialities. Dogged clinging to certain

> verities played out in prior experience are sometimes difficult to let loose, but the end result is worth the current struggles.

In this new environment, the more accepting and collaborative tone led to an enhanced sense of safety, and subsequent greater risk taking. Whereas in the past, one member of the faculty had backed down after asking questions about policies and procedures, and being told, "They're graduation requirements," or, "We've done that." now she heard colleagues respond, "We can revisit that now that we're a larger department." For her, new norms permitted the asking of old and new questions. She rediscovered her voice, and felt the freedom and safety of speaking out.

The reflective writings of another member of the department revealed her reflection on the significance of the cultural transformation underway.

> I have developed a respect for perspective and appreciate the opportunity for community building. I have identified that as trust building, sharing, true listening. We had a goal, we were working toward a goal which is part of building community. There is a perspective of independence, as well as one of interdependence. It is a forum for true communication.
>
> In working together on the case exam, we acted out or modeled the behavioral processes we wanted our students to use in their profession. It was truly profound for me.

d. Expanded awareness of individual interests and expertise along with increased willingness to share resources, ideas and experiences to help transform program.

A major theme which emerged as a shared experience among faculty members was their new knowledge of the expertise of their colleagues, and their access to that expertise.

> Before I had not been included in anything like this...something like the doctoral comprehensive exam would only be for selected people.

> Now, not only do we meet serendipitously--in the halls, in the copy room, or informally--going to a colleague and sharing something, but we have actually structured meeting times to share our research, to tell people what we're working on, or what we think another person might be interested in. Now that I know what individual people are doing, I don't hesitate to grab someone and say, "Sit down, listen to this, this is something you need to know, or something I am working on that is connected to your research...."

Another appreciated the pedagogical expertise of a colleague in a certain area, and freely sought out her assistance. He had been using some case studies in his own teaching, but, as he reported, "not as extensively as I should...mini-case studies, as opposed to more comprehensive ones." Now, not only did he feel a desire and need to use cases more fully, but he knew that among his peers was the expertise that could help his own growth. Further, for him the process of learning and sharing was "fun", a source of stimulation, excitement and true discovery.

One expressed the new respect she had gained for a colleague with whom she had worked for two years.

> I knew Bill was really steeped in the economics and collective negotiations piece, but I never really talked about that with him, or really considered how it fit into my piece on school-community relations.
>
> But now I have a deeper sense of the connections, of the impact of a community breakdown. When someone asked today, "Have any of you lived through a strike?," all of us who had, from an administrative perspective, could connect our shared experience. Through having shared common experiences, but with different expertise now brought to them, lights went on..

e. Articulation of shared desire to become less traditional and confirmation of commitment to thoughtful innovation and experimentation.

The process of departmental community building provided an opportunity for faculty to share their commitment to authentic program transformation. The very process of expressing new ideas, forging new working partnerships and creating

new models of teaching, learning and assessment emboldened faculty and deepened their development as courageous change agents.

One member of the department expressed her exhilaration with the change process.

> This was different...yes...definitely. To have the field wide open for how we wanted to design things. Before, it was more that we would receive things that had been written. The conversation would be quite narrow, not very diverse.
>
> Now, we feel we can express different perspectives and ideas. I used to feel that since one of my ideas might change the whole configuration of something, it would be easier not to deal with it. But now, we have a more heterogeneous group. We get a bone here and a feather overthere, and some peas in the pot. This has been a year of more flavorful discourse.

Another member of the department questioned not only the format and design of the doctoral comprehensive exam, but of the whole idea of the dissertation. "Is being less traditional being radical?", she wondered. How far could we go? What were the limits of eaxperimentation? In at least one university, the dissertation was no longer required; in others, technological literacy was. While there were institutional limitations and realities, such as Graduate Council, etc., there were no limitations on departmental discussions and dreams. And if one did not dream and ask, how would one know?

f. Transformation of program design, teaching methods and assessment models, with new emphasis on interdisciplinary case studies, complex problem identification and problem solving.

As may be already apparent, the process of transforming the culture of the department led to a transformation in the content and design of its offerings. Faculty saw the idea of the integrative doctoral exam as a driving force for a new coherence in all strands of the preparation program. Further, the process of collaboration and creative risk taking made new program design possible. Although, as one colleague

said, "We aren't really certain where we want it to end up yet, we're willing to take the chance, and we know that what we're creating is better than what we had."

Another colleague described how the new integrated approach transformed both teaching and assessment methods.

> What I found was that people in the department had different styles of thinking and that we needed to work to accommodate each of them and the way in which they worked. This gave me more insight than I would have had from other places.
>
> I saw too, that it helped us as a faculty to come to an agreement on what we thought were important critical skills that we felt our students needed, and it helped us to think about what we were talking about. We were looking for outcomes for our students and coming to a common agreement.

One member of the department spoke to the impact of the case exam writing process as it impacted overall program design.

> The process of writing the case study was highly significant. First we discussed the possibility of this approach, and agreed to proceed. There was an openness and willingness to experiment, to innovate. The process of writing was dynamic, exciting and bonding for all participants. We learned something of how we thought, because private understandings and knowledge were made explicit.
>
> The process was also cumulative: we built on what each person said, enriching, adding. We had collaborated to solve a real problem, and had based our actions on our professional knowledge, our experience, and all our prior lives' work as practicing administrators and professors. The complexity that we knew in our former lives as practitioners was now brought more directly into our work with our students--presenting them with more complex issues to be identified, analyzed and problem solved.

Finally, it was perceived that openness to new models of teaching and assessment were was ongoing, that the prime reality of our efforts was that were engaged in a process of dynamic change. It was known that the following year, there would be the addition of yet another new faculty member who would bring new

expertise from work in the field. Perhaps this would lead us to new models of program design, of going beyond the case study to having the doctoral students actually engaged in districts solving real on-site problems which could be used as a new basis for comprehensive assessment.

g. Increase in instances of collaboration: shared/team teaching; co-research and authorship efforts; co-proposal writing and conference presentation.

The final major impact of the reshaping of departmental community was the development of a collaborative learning and research community among faculty. Now that we had direct experience of the joy of true collaboration, motivation was enhanced to collaborate on further efforts within the department and in the greater academic community.

In fact, extraordinary riches developed in this area. New knowledge of research interests and sharing of expertise led to a flurry of collaborative activity. Three colleagues developed a shared presentation and paper for presentation at one national conference; two colleagues similarly prepared for their session at a second conference. Bolder efforts were made on behalf of the acquisition of external resources for shared projects--graduate assistants, university funding, external foundation monies.

What was in fact underway was the expanding vitality and dynamism of the transformed department. The process of shared struggle, collaboration and growth was changing the individual members of the department, their aspirations and accomplishments as professional educators and researchers. In addition, virtually every aspect of the entire department was being changed, resulting in dynamic new learning opportunities for students.

Conclusion

It is apparent, on reflection, that this process of change has indeed been "inside out". On the basis of this lived experiences, the writers believe that the goal of authentic administrator preparation program reform can most authentically be attained through transformation of the relationships of individual members of the faculty. Deliberate action that is informed by research and fueled by shared commitment can shape new departmental norms, values and purpose. Departmental community building can be the pathway to both higher levels of professional development and new standards of programmatic excellence.

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